

CHOCOLATE ROSEMARY TORTE, WITH ALMOND CHOCOLATE PINECONES

INGREDIENTS

for the Almond Chocolate Pinecones

18 ounces (3 cups) chocolate chips
14 ounces (1 standard can) sweetened condensed milk
2 ounces unsalted butter
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla (or almond) extract
1/2 cup milk chocolate wafers
3 cups sliced natural raw almonds

for the Chocolate Cake

1 cups boiling water
1/2 cup semisweet chocolate, chopped fine (I use a food processor to make almost a powder)
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoons baking soda
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup butter, softened
1 cup granulated sugar
3 eggs
2 teaspoon vanilla extract

for the Vanilla Rosemary Buttercream

1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese, softened
1/4 cup butter, softened
3 cups confectioners' sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste
1/4 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon very finely chopped fresh rosemary

for the Dark Chocolate Ganache

3 tablespoons corn syrup
6 ounces heavy cream
12 ounces dark chocolate, chopped into small pieces
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract

You will also need: twigs of fresh rosemary

DIRECTIONS

First make the Almond Chocolate Pinecones. These can be made up to a week in advance and stored in a cool area (not the refrigerator).

Combine the chocolate chips, condensed milk, butter, salt, and almond extract in a large microwave-safe bowl. Microwave for one minute, then stir well. If some of the chocolate chips haven't melted, microwave in 20 second increments, stirring every time, until the mixture is entirely melted and smooth. Press a piece of plastic wrap directly on top of the chocolate, and let it sit and firm up enough to roll, about 2 hours at room temperature (I would not put the mixture in the fridge to cool it down faster as if it gets too hard, it is impossible to work with.)

Use a quarter cup measure to form balls of dough about 3-4, inches. You should get about 15 pinecones of this size. You make them smaller or larger, but these seemed to work best for me, and I only needed about 12 for my cakes. Whichever size you choose, place your scoops on a baking sheet covered with waxed paper or parchment. Roll the fudge between your palms into an oval shape. Gently pinch one end

so that it comes to a subtle point and has a pine cone shape. Let sit on the parchment for 20 minutes or so before continuing.

Melt the milk chocolate wafers in the microwave, and stir until smooth. Dip one side of the bottom of a sliced almond in the melted coating, and press it against the back of one of the fudge pine cones. Dip a second sliced almond, then place it next to the first one, overlapping it slightly. Continue to add sliced almonds in an overlapping pattern, working back to front, until your fudge pine cone is covered with almonds. For the most realistic look, use only whole pieces of almond, and try to tilt them forward (instead of having them stick straight up and down). Once all of the pine cones are decorated, refrigerate the tray to set them briefly, for about 15 minutes. Store in a cool, dry place for up to a week.

A full photo tutorial on how to make the chocolate almond pinecones can be found here: <http://www.ohnuts.com/blog/chocolate-pinecones/>

To make the chocolate cake. Preheat oven to 350F. Spray 2 8-inch cake rounds with baking spray; set aside. In medium bowl, pour boiling water over cocoa, and whisk until smooth. Let mixture cool. Sift together flour, baking soda, baking powder and salt; set aside. In the bowl of a stand mixer, cream butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs one at a time, then stir in vanilla. Add the flour mixture alternately with the cocoa mixture, ending with the flour.

Fill the prepared cake pans three-quarters full, being careful not to overfill. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center of the cupcake comes out clean, about 30-35 minutes. Cool the cupcakes in the pan for 10 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Once cooled, slice each cake round in half horizontally.

While your cake is cooling, make your buttercream frosting and ganache. Beat the cream cheese and butter with an electric mixer in a bowl until smooth. Beat in the powdered sugar a little at a time until incorporated. Add the vanilla extract, vanilla bean paste, rosemary and salt; beat until fluffy. For the ganache, in a small saucepan combine the corn syrup and heavy cream.

Bring to a simmer and add the chocolate, then remove from the heat. Let sit for 5 minutes without stirring, then stir until smooth. Add the vanilla extract. To assemble, layer thin layers of the buttercream between the cake rounds (there will be four layers of cake). Once assembled, pour over the ganache, let drip down the sides and spread evenly. Let harden for 30 minutes in a cool area (not the refrigerator). Place 4-6 of the chocolate almond pinecones on the top of the cake (they should stick there to the ganache by themselves) and decorate with rosemary. Let cool for an additional hour before serving.